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Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee:

H.B. No. 7027: An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019,
And Making Appropriations Therefor.

Submitted By: Jeffrey Burgess, Board Member, Gilead Community Services

February 23rd, 2017

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Jeffrey Burgess. I am a senior executive for a national medical diagnostic services company but I am here this evening as a member and past President of the Board of Directors of Gilead Community Services, a Nonprofit Behavioral Healthcare Agency that provides a continuum of Behavioral Healthcare services including psychiatry, individual & group therapy, case management, supported apartment programming, fountain house model social rehabilitation services and a variety of specialized residential treatment options throughout Middlesex County. Gilead serves over 700 individuals each year who experience a variety of significant mental health conditions.

I was initially drawn to Gilead after having the opportunity to meet with several clients currently receiving mental health services. I was struck by their genuine appreciation for the changes Gilead had made in their lives and what the organization meant to them and in many cases, their families. On a tour with one of our state legislators we met a client who tearfully expressed how happy she was, that after years of being institutionalized, to be living in her own apartment. She was equally proud to show us the first Christmas tree she ever had.

For the past 12 years I have had the privilege of working with a lean and dedicated management team of administrators and clinicians who year after year continue to provide the highest quality services with ever decreasing State funding. In the private sector I come from, we deal with a lean management team, high productivity and significant outcomes. Based on these criteria, I would not hesitate to hire any member of the Gilead team as they all embody these attributes.

I want to express my deep concerns with H.B. 7027, in particular the funding reductions proposed to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). These proposed funding reductions would threaten critical services to individuals and families in our service area.

I am, also here to endorse the Governor's proposal to convert some state-run mental health and substance abuse services to the community sector. The long term cost savings in this conversion will prevent cuts in the very services I previously mentioned.

In my work with Gilead Community Services I have experienced a dedicated group of professionals provide impressive outcomes for more clients at lower cost, however there comes a tipping point where these positive outcomes become compromised. The current budget proposal threatens the sustainability of all three of our Group Homes, our Apartment Programs, our ACT Team (intensive outpatient services), our Outpatient Clinics and our

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Fountain House Model Social Rehabilitation Program at their current census. Budget cuts to the DMHAS Managed Service System will force us to reduce staffing within these programs and reduce our census. This means that individuals in need of this care will either not receive the care (resulting in homelessness and other high risk scenarios) or they will turn to more expensive options for the care (Police, Emergency Rooms, State Services, etc.). In addition to this, inadequate Medicaid Reimbursement rates, which will continue according to this budget proposal, threaten our ability to continue to serve the 250+ Medicaid recipients who receive services through our Outpatient Clinic.

Over recent years, my organization has been forced to reduce capacity and serve fewer individuals at a time when the need in our community for mental health services is rising dramatically. Specifically, we have recently been forced to reduce our capacity at our Rehab Center and close some badly needed programs – purely to enable us to divert money and resources into other clinical programs in order to keep them viable. These effect our client's lives.

Equally important are the negative effects on our employees. Gilead employs over 200 dedicated staff and these projected funding reductions jeopardize their jobs, their families, their futures and their ability to help clients who depend on them (and in many cases represent the only family they have). They don't work in this field to get rich. You do this in order to create a better life for others less fortunate. Each year we lose dozens of experienced, compassionate staff members who will seek better paying positions in order to prepare for their own future and take care of their families.

As you work toward creating your 'Recommended Budget' for FY 18 and 19, I strongly urge you to maintain an adequate level of funding and community sector -partnerships to ensure critical programs and services are available to the residents of Connecticut. Additionally I suggest that the State examine the cost effectiveness of their invested dollars versus clinical outcomes. Gilead and other organizations have proven time and again their ability to translate available dollars into more effective outcomes (at least until the money runs out). Investing in the nonprofit sector will improve service delivery, increase economic activity, and save taxpayer money; a "win-win" for policymakers working to strengthen the economy, the nonprofit workforce trying to make ends meet, and most importantly, the clients and their families who count-on efficient, cost-effective, and high-quality services.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my concerns with you this evening and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, or for additional information.

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